



BOROUGH OF BERGENFIELD  
**RENT LEVELING BOARD**  
jluppino@bergenfieldnj.gov  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

Co-chairman, Catherine Steinel called the meeting to order at 7:00pm, with reading the Open Public Meetings Act Statement.

**Roll Call**

Present: Robert Policano, Catherine Steinel, Christopher Arp, Diane Carlson, Andy Lehr, Maureen Sullivan

Absent: Sylvia Rosario

Also Present: Mark Pascual, Councilman; Jaime Luppino, Clerk; Emma Rush (via conference call at 7:39pm), Borough Attorney; Maryam Varela, Turkish Translator

**Pledge of Allegiance**

Led by Robert Policano.

**Complaints**

**293 S Washington Ave, Apt. 15, Bergenfield, NJ 07621**

Tenant Cagdas Gayretli, leases Apartment #15 at 294 S Washington Ave, Building 2, Bergenfield, filed a complaint against the landlord for unlawfully increasing rent on January 1, 2026. Notice was provided to the Landlord and Tenant of a hearing at Borough Hall, on March 11<sup>th</sup> at 7pm. The Rent Leveling Board determined that the complete and proper for the hearing.

Tenant and a Landlord representative appeared before the board *pro se*. The tenant required a Turkish translator. Maryam Varela was provided to the tenant at the Board's expense.

Landlord representative requested an adjournment of the matter from Jennifer Alexander, Esq. of Griffin Alexander, P.C. dated March 11, 2026. Landlord's representative was asked to clarify the retention timeline, the Landlord's representative testified that Griffin Alexander, P.C. has been on "constant retainer" as general counsel for some time, which contradicted the representation from counsel in the letter. Due to the late notice, the Board denied the adjournment and proceeded with hearing.

Tenant lived in the apartment since January 2022, with his 11 year old son. His former employer, Durmus Koch, co-signed his original lease. January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024, the monthly rent was \$1,632.00, which was paid in full every month. January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025, the monthly rent was \$1,714.00, which was paid in full from January 2025 through October 2025. In September 2025, tenant received noticed that the monthly rent was going to be increase to \$1,800.00 in 2026, or in the event that tenant did not sign a lease, the rent would be increased to \$3,428.00. In October 2025, tenant lost his job, and since his employer, Mr. Koch was the co-signor on his original lease, tenant was not able to execute the 2026 lease agreement without a new co-signor. For November and December 2025, the tenant did not pay the rent, instead asked Mr. Koch to pay, as the guarantor. Mr. Koch did not pay the November and December (2025) rent. As result, in December 2025, the landlord brought an eviction action in New Jersey Superior



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Court (under Docket No. BER-LT-007319-25). On February 18, 2026, the landlord and tenant settle the eviction matter for \$9,118.40, broken down as \$3,428.00 for months of November 2025 and December 2025 and \$5,690.40 for the months of January 2026 and February 2026. Part of the settlement agreement, tenant's rent from March 1, 2026 to December 31, 2026 was set at \$1,714.00 per month. Landlord has improperly increased tenant's rent in 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026.

Motion was made by Catherine Steinel to go into closed session for legal advice. Robert Policano seconded the motion.

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Sylvia Rosario                 |     |    |         | ✓      |        |

Board members entered into closed session at 7:23pm.

Motion was made by Catherine Steinel to return to open session. Maureen Sullivan seconded the motion.

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Sylvia Rosario                 |     |    |         | ✓      |        |

Board members returned to open session at 7:35pm.

The Landlord's representative did not dispute tenant's above testimony. On February 18, 2026, the landlord and tenant settled the matter for approximately \$13,000.00 and landlord accepted partial payment of \$9,188.40 because the tenant did not have any additional funds at the time. Tenant's monthly rent from March 1, 2026 to December 31, 2026 was set at approximately \$1,714.00, with an additional surcharge to accommodate this month to month tenancy.

The board concluded that tenants must challenge an improper rent increase within 18 months of the imposition of that improper rent increase, or they are forever barred from challenging that increase. Tenant can lawfully challenge the 2025 and 2026 rent increases, imposed on January 1 of that respective calendar year. Landlords are only allowed a 4% annual increase. Tenant's monthly rent was \$1,632.00 in 2024, a 4% increase would be amounted to \$1,697.28 for 2025. Tenant paid \$1,714.00 for all of 2025, overpaying \$16.72 each month. Landlord owes the tenant



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from the 2025 overpayment, totaling \$200.64. Proof of reimbursement to the Rent Leveling Board by April 30, 2026. 2026 rent was actually set to, as per the agreement letter sent by landlord on February 24, 2026, Tenant's maximum rent in 2026 shall be \$1,714.00.

**Motion Offered by Maureen Sullivan **Second** by Diane Carlson**

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |

**New Business**

**-19-21 Home Place, Apt 1B, Bergenfield, NJ 07621- Application for Exemption  
Christopher Arp recused himself.**

Application for Exemption from Rent Control was submitted by the landlord, Christopher Arp d/b/a AVB Home Place LLC on February 24, 2026. Hearing was set for March 11, 2026. Landlord appeared before the Board *pro se* and the tenant, Marie Eriksen, failed to appear. Landlord stated that tenant reside in apartment 1B, which is a one-bedroom apartment. Tenant is a recipient of a state housing subsidy, one offered by the Housing Assistance Program, from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA). DCA pays a portion of tenant's monthly rent and tenant pays the difference. The DCA has set tenant's monthly rent at \$1,115.00 for the period of October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025, DCA portion was \$603.00 and tenant's portion was \$512.00. Landlord seeks an annual rental increase with the DCA for the period of October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026 in excess of 4%. Landlord would be entitled to an increase in excess of 4% under the Housing Assistance Program's rental guidelines. The DCA will not entertain a request until tenant's apartment in exempt from Bergenfield Rent Control Chapter.

Motion was made by Diane Carlson to go into closed session for legal advice. Andy Lehr seconded the motion.

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                |     |    |         |        | ✓      |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Sylvia Rosario                 |     |    |         | ✓      |        |

Board members entered into closed session at 8:26pm.



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Motion was made by Robert Policano to return to open session. Diane Carlson seconded the motion..

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                |     |    |         |        | ✓      |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Sylvia Rosario                 |     |    |         | ✓      |        |

Board members returned to open session at 8:37pm.

The board concluded that the requirements for the exemption have been satisfied because the Housing Assistance Program sets forth rent increase standards, which preempts the Board from enforcing Borough Code Chapter 24 Rent Control. Tenant is exempt from the protections of Code § 240-5, regarding the 4% cap on annual rent increase, and the landlord may negotiate with the DCA for a monthly rent increase in excess of 4%. With the understanding that the landlord shall not raise the Tenant's portion of the rent more than 4% annually. In the event that the DCA increase tenant's portion of the rent more than 4%, landlord will cover increase portion. If the tenant loses her housing subsidy in the future, the monthly rent will revert back to \$1,115.00 and landlord will be granted a 4% increase for every year that has passed.

**Motion Offered** by Maureen Sullivan **Second** by Diane Carlson

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                |     |    |         |        | ✓      |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Sylvia Rosario                 |     |    |         | ✓      |        |

**-19-21 Home Place, Apt 2A, Bergenfield, NJ 07621- Application for Exemption**

Application for Exemption from Rent Control was submitted by the landlord, Christopher Arp d/b/a AVB Home Place LLC on February 24, 2026. Hearing was set for March 11, 2026. Landlord appeared before the Board *pro se*. The tenant, Gloria Rivas and her daughter, appeared, with council David Arnold of North East NJ Legal Cert. Christopher Arp recused himself. Landlord stated that tenant reside in apartment 2A. Tenant is a recipient of a state housing subsidy, one offered by the Section 8. Council for Gloria Rivas requested an adjournment.



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Motion was made by Catherine Steinel to postpone hearing to April 1, 2026. Diane Carlson seconded the motion .

| Roll Call                      | Yes | No | Abstain | Absent | Recuse |
|--------------------------------|-----|----|---------|--------|--------|
| Robert Policano, Chairman      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Catherine Steinel, Co-Chairman | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Christopher Arp                |     |    |         |        | ✓      |
| Diane Carlson                  | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Andy Lehr                      | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Maureen Sullivan               | ✓   |    |         |        |        |
| Sylvia Rosario                 |     |    |         | ✓      |        |

**Public Comment-**

- **Tenant Shawn Gianella, from 19-21 Home Pl, Bergenfield. Asked for some clarification about going 6 months with no lease. Tenants are all concerned about not having leases.**

**Approval of February 2026 Meeting Minutes. Motion made by Maureen Sullivan, seconded by Catherine Steinel. All present voting in favor, none opposed.**

**Monthly Reports-**

**Motion was made by Robert Policano to issue \$150.00 fine, plus court fees and late fees to 215 Hickory Bergen LLC- Court date 3/17/26. Seconded Catherine Steinel. All present voting in favor, none opposed.**

**Motion was made by Maureen Sullivan to accept the monthly reports. Seconded by Andy Lehr. All present voting in favor, none opposed.**

**Old Business-**

**Review of Capital Improvement Application. Changes made were page 18- C. change "Project 2" to "Project 3"; page 19- D. change "Project 2" to "Project 4"; Add Notary section to last page. Motion was made by Catherine Steinel to accept changes. Seconded by Maureen Sullivan. All present voting in favor, none opposed.**



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**Adjournment-**

- A motion was made by Catherine Steinel, seconded by Robert Policano, to adjourn the meeting. All present voting in favor, none opposed. Meeting adjourned at 9:41pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jaime Luppino*

Jaime Luppino, Recording Secretary